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NATIONAL TRUCK TO ROLL OUT IN MID-1997

By: Tham Choy Lin

TOKYO, May 16 (Bernama) -- Production of Malaysia's national truck in joint venture with Isuzu Motors Ltd of Japan will begin by the middle of 1997 with production estimated at 6,000 units in the first 12 months.

Annual productionIt was projected to jump to 20,000 units in the third year, an Isuzu spokesman was quoted as saying in The Japan Times daily today.

The Malaysian partners in the project are Hicom Holdings Bhd and its subsidiary, Diversified Resources Bhd (DRB), which signed a Memorandum of Understanding with Isuzu, Japan's largest commercial vehicle maker, on Tuesday.

Isuzu, which had asked for a 20 to 25 percent stake in the project, made the announcement yesterday.

The trucks, based on Isuzu's light-duty Elf model weighing between 3.5 and 7 tons, would be sold in Malaysia by a joint venture company of the three parties and exported to other Asian countries in the future.

The trucks would be produced by DRB-owned Automotive Manufacturers Malaysia Sdn Bhd at its plant in Pekan, Pahang, where another DRB subsidiary, ACM Sdn Bhd, has been assembling Isuzu vehicles for the Malaysian market since 1984.

The signing of the MOU at Isuzu's largest manufacturing plant in Fujisawa, 60 km south of here, was witnessed by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

Dr Mahathir had assured Isuzu president Kazuhira Seki that the Malaysian government would give its full support to ensure the success of the project, both, for the Japanese manufacturer and its Malaysian partners.

Hicom was represented by its president and executive chairman Datuk Seri Yahaya Ahmad, DRB by group managing director Datuk Saleh Sulong while Seki signed for Isuzu.

Dr Mahathir was given a sneak preview of two prototypes of the truck. He had asked Isuzu to keep production costs as low as possible to make the vehicle attractive on the domestic and foreign market as well as to help Malaysia reduce its current account deficit.

Hicom also owns Perusahaan Otomobil Nasional Bhd (Proton) which produces the national car with Mitsubishi Motors Corp while DRB produces another Proton range with French producer, Citroen. -- BERNAMA

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